DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 626 UD 023 271

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TITLE Effect of ECIA on Evaluation Practice: Early Returns.
INSTITUTION Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, Oreg. Office of Research and Evaluation Services.
PUB DATE Mar 83
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Block Grants; Compensatory Education; Decentralization; Educational Change; *Educational Legislation; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Federal Aid; *Federal Legislation; Government Role; Government School Relationship; *Program Evaluation; *School Districts; *State Departments of Education
IDENTIFIERS *Education Consolidation and Improvement Act 1981

ABSTRACT

Over 30 professional evaluators in five state departments of education and 5 large school districts were interviewed periodically over a 10-month period in 1982 to find out how the Education Consolidation Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA) was affecting program evaluation activities. Preliminary findings on the impact of ECIA Chapter 1 (compensatory education) indicated that the ECIA legislation had not significantly eliminated administrative load or paperwork. It was reported that there has been a relaxation in testing requirements under Chapter 1; more interest in sustained effects studies at both state and local levels; and a change in the forms of parental involvement. Chapter 1 budget cuts had a more dramatic impact than the new legislation, bringing about dramatic reductions in the number of children served. Preliminary findings on the impact of Chapter 2 (block grants) indicated that the legislation had increased flexibility and decentralization at the local level while reallocating some of the previous categorical funds to smaller districts. Most of Chapter 2 funds were being spent on materials and microcomputers, with evaluators primarily monitoring the flow and expenditure of funds. (CMG)

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ED237626

EFFECT OF ECIA ON EVALUATION PRACTICE:

EARLY RETURNS

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March 1983

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UD 023 271

Overview

The Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) of 1981 was designed in part to change the nature of educational evaluation required by the federal government at state and local levels. Will the new requirements indeed consolidate and improve evaluation activities? Because this new legislation will probably have the greatest impact on the nature of evaluation practice in education since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, we conducted a ten-month study of five state departments of education and five large school districts to learn how evaluation units responded to this legislation during 1982.

One of the basic moves by the Reagan Administration in its effort to change the federal role in education was to propose the consolidation of most categorical education programs into a few large block grants. Congress, reacting to pressure from those representing the disadvantaged, the handicapped, and others, resisted this move.

In the end, the major legislation for the disadvantaged (Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA), the handicapped (PL 94-142, Education for all Handicapped Children Act), vocational and adult education (The Vocational Education Act), and a few other programs (e.g., impact aid, student financial assistance), survived as separate entities. But, 30-40 previous categorical aid programs were combined into one large block grant. Included were such programs as basic skills education, metric education, consumer education, gifted and talented education, and programs providing funds for library resources, textbooks and instructional equipment, guidance and counseling, desegregation, and teacher training and in-service.

The disadvantaged student legislation, Title I, and the block grant legislation were combined in Subtitle D of Title V of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 (PL 97-35) as Chapters 1 and 2, respectively, of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA). The resultant effects of

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 legislation on evaluation practice offer graphic examples of the mixed results achieved by the Administration.

The reasoning behind Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 is reflected in the legislation itself (PL 97-35, August 13, 1982). The Chapter 1 Declaration of Policy states that it is the intent of the legislation to:

> eliminate burdensome, unnecessary, and unproductive paper work and free the schools of unnecessary Federal supervision, direction, and control.
>
> (p. 95 STAT. 464)

In addition, it is intended that the legislation will do away with

> overly prescriptive regulations and administrative burdens which are not necessary for fiscal accountability and make no contribution to the instructional program.
>
> (p. 95 STAT. 464)

The purpose of the block grant (Chapter 2) was essentially to free state and local education agencies to set their own priorities and conduct programs as they saw fit. Beyond this intent, the new legislation was:

> to do so in a manner designed to greatly reduce the enormous administrative and paperwork burden imposed on schools at the expense of their ability to educate children.
>
> (p. 95 STAT. 469)

Clearly, the intent of ECIA was to shift the responsibility for setting policy, monitoring fiscal procedures, and designing, operating, and evaluating educational programs out of Washington, D.C. The full impact of this shift on state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) and ultimately on this nation's children is now only beginning to manifest itself. To date, the ECIA legislation does not appear to have entirely had the desired effect.

> Ronald Reagan entered the White House two years ago with a commitment to overhaul the federal role in American education.

> "Education," he told the country in a televised address, "is the principal responsibility of local school systems, teachers, parents, citizen boards and state governments."...
>
> Two years later, as members of the Administration are the first to acknowledge, efforts to redefine and reshape the Federal role in education show mixed results.
>
> (The New York Times, November 14, 1982)

This summary describes the purpose, design, results, and implications of a preliminary field investigation of ECIA impact.

Study Purpose

The study reported here focused on the initial impact of ECIA. In some cases, these findings will hold true over the long run, while in other cases, additional changes may alter dramatically the perceptions and implementation of Chapter 1 or Chapter 2 requirements. The full impact of the legislation has not yet been felt, but these "early returns" are important; they give us insights into the initial responses to the ECIA and help shape further research on this legislation, including longer term impact studies. More specifically, the study was intended to illuminate the effect of Chapters 1 and 2 on program evaluation operations and on evaluation training and technical assistance needs.

Study Design

Five western states, namely California, Montana, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, were chosen to represent states in the Northwest part of the country. They therefore provide a limited sample of perspectives on the impact of ECIA.

Within these states, people were interviewed who were (a) responsible for evaluation in general and/or (b) responsible for Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 evaluation in particular, at the state

level and in the largest school district in each state. As a result of personnel changes at state and local levels, we interviewed over 30 professional evaluators and educators during this study. In the November 1982 final interview we talked with 24 respondents. We classified their positions as:

5 SEA evaluation directors
5 LEA evaluation directors
5 SEA Chapter 1 evaluators
5 LEA Chapter 1 evaluators
4 LEA Chapter 2 sources

A semi-structured interview instrument was developed and revised on the basis of pilot trials. The form was modified as necessary to reflect changing field conditions over the course of the study, but the same basic questions were retained throughout the study and they form the basis of the results presented here. Respondents were interviewed periodically between February 1982, and November 1982, giving a ten-month perspective on changing responses to the new legislation.

Preliminary Results

The following summaries give a brief overview of the preliminary study findings and are based on the study results appearing in the complete report (A Study in Contrasts: Effects of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 on SEA and LEA Evaluation. Gray, Smith, Caulley, 1982. A copy of the full report is available from the first author.). The full report focuses on the sometimes subtle differences between state and local perceptions. Provided in the complete report are examples of the differing perceptions of some of the more complex concepts investigated: unnecessary and burdensome paperwork; supervision, monitoring and evaluation; flexibility and decentralization; administrative burden. The reader is therefore encouraged to read this overview in light of its purpose as a brief summary of more detailed findings.

Summary of Preliminary Chapter 1 Findings

Both state (SEA) and local (LEA) evaluators reported that Title I paperwork was not seen as burdensome and unnecessary, nor was any major change in this regard reported at the local level relative to Chapter 1 paperwork. In addition, overall, state and local Chapter 1 directors reported little perceived change in administrative or evaluation flexibility, decentralization of responsibility, or administrative burden regarding rules and regulations. A major reason for the perceived continuity in administrative practice is that the formal Title I Evaluation and Reporting System (TIERS) is being retained in all states represented in this study. The changes that have occurred concern dropping the collection of certain types of data (e.g., ethnic data, parent council data, staff training data, and project data), a point specifically addressed in the new legislation.

LEA Chapter 1 directors did, however, report a perceived relaxation in the testing and reporting requirements of Chapter 1. For example, one district is contemplating using a criterion referenced testing program. Previously, such programs were not encouraged since it is difficult to generate student pre- and post-test data which can be relied upon to give as accurate a picture of growth as scores from standardized, norm-referenced tests. In another district, it was said that percentile scores would be emphasized instead of the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores favored by TIERS. Both of these changes were perceived by local directors as efforts to make testing and test results more meaningful to local audiences.

An increased emphasis on sustained effects studies was reported at both the state and local levels, consistent with the emphasis in the legislation on such studies. Sustained effects studies trace the impact of a program over time. The impact may be defined in terms of student achievement or some other program characteristic of interest. Such studies can be very useful in monitoring program quality, planning program improvement, and

reporting program impact. Sustained effects studies represent another way of making evaluations relevant to local audiences since they focus on questions of interest to local decision makers, including administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Parent involvement in Chapter 1 programs is taking on new forms consistent with the change in emphasis in the legislation. For example, in one school district "willingness to work" was being valued over "representativeness" in forming the school parent councils. In another district the new Chapter 2 advisory council will include parents from the Chapter 1 council resulting in more efficient administration of the two programs.

A clear message regarding Chapter 1 came from our respondents. As a continuation of a well institutionalized program, Chapter 1/Title I evaluators will experience few immediate changes. However, some of the testing and administrative changes could accumulate to produce an impact in the future, possibly resulting in less nationwide data available for Congress to examine the overall effects of Chapter 1.

Chapter 1 budget reductions have had a more dramatic impact on the local level than the new legislation, resulting in cuts in instructional staff, and consequently, a reduction in the number of students served. In discussing the impact of losing almost one million dollars of Chapter 1 monies, a school district evaluator noted,

> The real change has come about because of decreased funding, which has severely crippled our program. I was at a school this morning that had five aides and a teacher last year; this year it has one aide and a half-time teacher. That's a big difference in numbers of kids they can serve, etc. They've reduced their math services to working with 10 kids as opposed to 40. That resulted because of budgetary cuts, not Chapter 1 regulation.

This district budget reduction had lowered by 1000 the number of children served. As the respondent noted, "when you go to individual schools you really see what that means."

The most notable immediate change regarding Chapter 1, then, is in regard to the level of service being offered. The reduction in staff, in the number of students served, and perhaps in the quality of that service, will have long range effects on Chapter 1 impact and on the overall effectiveness of compensatory education.

> Chapter 1 Findings: While the ECIA legislation has not significantly eliminated paperwork or administrative load, these were not especially burdensome to begin with. Some changes are occurring in loosening testing requirements, increasing the interest in sustained effects, and altering parent involvement, changes which are likely to increase the local utility of Chapter 1 evaluation activities. The more significant influence on Chapter 1 than the new legislation is the decrease in budgets which is dramatically reducing the number of children that can be served.

Summary of Preliminary Chapter 2 Findings

Most states reported that their Chapter 2 evaluations will consist of monitoring Chapter 2 expenditures for materials in terms of simple cost accounting procedures. At least initially, these states will evaluate expenditures for programs in terms of the number of students served and staff involved. This concern with the numbers involved in programs is to a great extent a reflection of the fact that, typically, 80 percent or more of Chapter 2 funds will go for instructional materials and equipment (mostly microcomputer hardware). The existing categorical programs are likely to take the remaining Chapter 2 funds.

SEA respondents were well aware of the legislative mandate to conduct Chapter 2 evaluation studies beginning in fiscal year 1984, and are communicating this to local administrators. Some LEA evaluation directors are considering innovative research and evaluation activities under Chapter 2 including:

- the study of school practices and learning using ethnographic approaches,

- the study of teaching behaviors and outcomes using causal modeling methods,

- the adaptation of the evaluation components of previous categorical programs,

- the development of locally run mini-grant programs

Similar non-traditional efforts may emerge in other districts.

Most large school districts in our study reported a reduction in funds under Chapter 2, in comparison with the funds they received under the previous categorical aid programs. As a result, large school district respondents reported the need to find ways to select among programs competing for reduced funds. Some small school districts have had modest increases in funding as a result of Chapter 2 allocations, typically increases of $800 to $2500 per district, and are seeking ways to join with other districts to get the most from their increases.

Almost all the SEA and LEA Chapter 2 respondents reported increased flexibility and decentralization at the local level as a result of the Chapter 2 legislation. They had mixed feelings about possible reductions in administrative burden, however. There is also considerable uncertainty about future evaluation activities at the local level under Chapter 2. Once programming decisions have been made and the first round of materials and microcomputer equipment purchases completed, it is expected that evaluators will move from monitoring expenditures to assessing the quality and impact of Chapter 2 programs.

Chapter 2 Findings: The ECIA legislation has increased flexibility and decentralization at the local level while reallocating some of the previous categorical funds to smaller districts. Most of the Chapter 2 funds are being spent on materials and microcomputer equipment purchases, with evaluators primarily monitoring the flow and expenditure of funds. Increasingly, however, LEA evaluators will be doing more to evaluate the impact of the new programs at the local level.

Conclusions

These early returns indicate that the ECIA legislation has not substantially reduced the paperwork or administrative burden under Chapter 1, although some changes are taking place to increase the local utility of evaluation efforts. The largest changes in Chapter 1 have resulted from major budget cuts and subsequent reductions in the numbers of children served.

Most Chapter 2 monies are being spent on materials and microcomputers. The ECIA legislation has given more money to smaller districts and has increased local flexibility and control. Evaluators, who are now primarily monitoring the expenditure of funds, are expected to conduct more studies of program effectiveness in the next few years.

While these results are based on only a preliminary study of ECIA impact in five northwestern states, they are suggestive of the early impact of the new Reagan legislation on SEA and LEA evaluation practice. We may speculate that in the near future evaluators will be dealing with concerns such as the following at both the programmatic and policy levels:

- with reduced program and evaluation budgets
  - evaluators will be called upon to perform more cost-related studies
  - evaluators will have greater difficulty meeting the demand for evaluation services
  - evaluators will need to attend more to helping program staff maintain program quality control
- with the increasing use of microcomputers
  - evaluators will be called upon to assess the instructional impact of microcomputers
  - evaluators will need to learn more themselves about the operation of microcomputers, possibly beginning to use them as an evaluation tool

- with increased LEA flexibility and control
  - evaluators may have more diffictulty maintaining evidence of state and federal accountability
  - evaluators will be called upon more to assess Chapter 1 sustained effects
  - evaluators will be called upon more to help small LEAs with Chapter 2 evaluation activities.

These and other concerns will continue to surface as LEAs and SEAs gain continued experience under the new ECIA legislation. We hope our early returns help future researchers sharpen their studies of this major federal change in educational evaluation policy.